



IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus in the form of a unit comprising:
a binding mechanism supported on a housing for binding a plurality of paper sheets
by a staple needle; and
a moving mechanism supported on said housing for moving said binding mechanism;
wherein said housing comprises a pair of side plates and a pair of stays for connecting
said side plates to each other, and said stays are constituted by said moving mechanism.

Claim 2 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said stays
are partially constituted by a pair of thin plates having a substantially U-shaped cross-section.

Claim 3 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus as claimed in Claim 2, wherein the back
of said thin plate having a substantially U-shaped cross-section is aligned in the direction
approximately perpendicular to the longitudinal direction of the side plate in one thin plate,
and aligned in an approximately parallel direction in the other thin plate.

Claim 4 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said
binding mechanism and a space section for passing the paper sheets are both interposed
between said thin plates.

Claim 5 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said stays
are partially constituted by a pair of shaft members having a substantially circular cross-
section.

Claim 6 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus as claimed in Claim 5, wherein said shaft members serve as a position controlling mechanism for limiting the position of the binding mechanism movably supported on said shaft members around the axis.

Claim 7 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said stays comprise only a pair of thin plates having a substantially U-shaped cross-section and a pair of shaft members having a substantially circular cross-section.

Claim 8 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus comprising:

a binding mechanism for binding a plurality of sheets between a stitcher section and a clincher section with a staple needle, said binding mechanism being equipped with said stitcher section including a staple needle storing section and a needle pushing out section and with a clincher section for bending one end of said needle in a separate manner;

supporting members for guiding said stitcher section and said clincher section to support said binding mechanism in a parallel manner; and

moving mechanisms for moving said binding mechanism along said supporting members;

wherein a position controlling member for limiting the position of said supporting members and another controlling member for limiting the position of said binding mechanism around each of said supporting members as a center thereof are pair-wise disposed, and

wherein a channel for moving a binding needle pushed out from said stitcher section is disposed in the vicinity of a line connecting the centers of said supporting members, viewed in the axial direction of said supporting elements.

Claim 9 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus comprising:

a binding mechanism for binding a plurality of paper sheets between a stitcher section and a clincher section with a staple needle, said binding mechanism being equipped with said stitcher section including a staple needle storing section and a needle pushing out section and with a clincher section for bending one end of said needle in a separate manner;

supporting members for guiding said stitcher section and said clincher section to support said binding mechanism in a parallel manner; and

moving mechanisms for moving said binding mechanism along said supporting members;

wherein a position controlling member for limiting the position of said supporting members and another controlling member for limiting the position of said binding mechanism around each of said supporting members as a center thereof are pair-wise disposed, and

wherein a channel for moving a binding needle pushed out from said stitcher section is disposed in a space between said supporting members, viewed in the axial direction of said supporting members.

Claim 10 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus as claimed in Claim 8, wherein said channel for moving said binding needle is disposed on the line connecting the centers of said supporting members.

Claim 11 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus as claimed in Claim 8 or 9, wherein said supporting members and said position controlling members are interposed between said side plates to form a housing.

Claim 12 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus as claimed in Claim 11, wherein said position controlling member is constituted by a thin plate having a substantially U-shaped cross-section.

Claim 13 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus as claimed in Claim 12, wherein a portion of the back of said position controlling member having a U-shaped cross-section is aligned in a direction approximately perpendicular to the longitudinal direction of the side plate for the one rotation controlling member and in a direction approximately parallel to the longitudinal direction for the other stay.

Claim 14 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus as claimed in Claim 13, wherein a harness connected to said binding mechanism is stored in said position controlling member.

Claim 15 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus as claimed in Claim 8, wherein said moving mechanism comprises a timing belt, a driving mechanism for driving said timing belt and a motor for supplying a driving force to said driving mechanism, and wherein said timing belt is disposed parallel to said supporting members in the vicinity of a line connecting the centers of the supporting members, viewed in the axial direction thereof.

Claim 16 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus as claimed in Claim 9, wherein said moving mechanism comprises a timing belt, a driving mechanism for driving said timing belt and a motor for supplying a driving force to said driving mechanism, and wherein said timing belt is disposed parallel to said supporting members on an extending line of a space between the supporting members, viewed in the axial direction thereof.

Claim 17 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus as claimed in Claim 15, wherein said moving mechanism comprises a sub-mechanism for moving the stitcher section and a sub-mechanism for moving the clincher section, and wherein said sub-mechanisms are symmetrically disposed with respect to said supporting members.

Claim 18 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus as claimed in Claim 15, wherein said driving mechanism includes a driving pulley and a driven pulley, and wherein said driven pulley is disposed on said supporting members.

Claim 19 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus as claimed in Claim 8, wherein a space for exchanging the needle is interposed between the supporting member for supporting said stitcher section and the position controlling member on the side of said supporting members.

Claim 20 (Withdrawn): A binding apparatus as claimed in Claim 19, wherein said position controlling member is disposed approximately parallel to the moving direction of the binding needle.

Claim 21 (Withdrawn): A paper processing apparatus comprising:
a binding apparatus; and
a paper processing mechanism for executing a predetermined process including the binding process to a paper sheet on which an image is formed,
wherein said binding apparatus including a binding mechanism for binding a plurality of paper sheets with a staple needle and a moving mechanism for moving said binding mechanism is supported on a housing to form a unit, and

wherein said housing comprises a pair of side plates and a pair of stays connecting said side plates, and said stays are constituted by said moving mechanism.

Claim 22 (Withdrawn): A paper processing apparatus comprising:

a binding apparatus; and

a paper processing mechanism for executing a predetermined process including the binding process to a paper sheet on which an image is formed,

wherein said binding apparatus, which is equipped with a stitcher section including a space for storing staple needles and a portion for pushing said staple needle as well as with a clincher section for bending one end of said staple needle, comprises a binding mechanism for binding a plurality of paper sheets between said stitcher section and said clincher section with said staple needle; supporting members for supporting said binding mechanism and for guiding said stitcher section and said clincher section in a parallel manner; and a moving mechanism for moving said binding mechanism along said supporting elements,

wherein said supporting members and position controlling members for adjusting the position of said binding mechanism around said supporting members at the centers of said supporting members are pair-wise disposed, and

wherein a channel for receiving a binding needle pushed out from said stitcher section is disposed in the vicinity of a line connecting the centers of said supporting members, viewed in the axial direction of said supporting members.

Claim 23 (Withdrawn): A paper processing apparatus as claimed in Claim 22, wherein rollers for movement are mounted in the housing of said binding apparatus and rails for the roller are mounted in the main body of said paper processing apparatus, wherein said binding apparatus is mounted such that it can be drawn out by a predetermined distance with

respect to said paper processing apparatus by moving said rollers on said rails, and wherein the backside of said stitcher is opened over the entire area of moving said binding mechanism, when said binding apparatus is drawn out.

Claim 24 (Withdrawn): An image forming system comprising:

a paper processing apparatus and an image forming apparatus for forming a visual image on a paper sheet based on the input image information,

wherein said paper processing apparatus is formed as a unit by supporting on a housing a binding apparatus; a paper processing mechanism for executing a predetermined process including the binding process after receiving a paper sheet on which an image is formed; a binding mechanism for binding a plurality of paper sheets with a staple needle; and a moving mechanism for moving said binding mechanism, and

wherein said housing comprises a pair of side plates and a pair of stays for connecting said side plates, and said stays are formed by said moving mechanism.

Claim 25 (Currently Amended): A paper processing apparatus including a process mechanism for applying a predetermined process to a paper sheet after forming an image, the paper processing apparatus comprising:

a stack mechanism for stacking paper sheets;

a first alignment mechanism for aligning a paper bundle stacked in said stack mechanism;

a first convey mechanism for conveying a paper bundle aligned by said first alignment mechanism;

a second alignment mechanism for aligning the paper bundle conveyed by said first convey mechanism ~~in the vicinity of a folding position;~~

a second convey mechanism, for conveying the paper bundle aligned by said second alignment mechanism ~~to said folding position~~;

a folding mechanism for folding the paper bundle ~~at said folding position~~,

wherein the second alignment mechanism is configured to align the paper bundle conveyed by the first convey mechanism in a vicinity of a folding position to fold the paper bundle,

wherein the second convey mechanism is configured to convey the paper bundle aligned by the second alignment mechanism to the folding position, and

wherein the folding mechanism is configured to fold the aligned paper bundle at the folding position.

Claim 26 (Currently Amended): A paper processing apparatus including a process mechanism for applying a predetermined process to a paper sheet after forming an image, the paper processing apparatus comprising:

a stack mechanism for stacking paper sheets;

a first alignment mechanism for aligning a paper bundle stacked in said stack mechanism;

a first convey mechanism for conveying a paper bundle aligned by said first alignment mechanism;

a binding mechanism for applying the binding process to a paper bundle;

a second alignment mechanism for aligning ~~in the vicinity of a folding position~~ the paper bundle which is bound by said binding mechanism and conveyed by said first convey mechanism;

a second convey mechanism for conveying the paper bundle aligned by said second alignment mechanism ~~to said folding position~~; and

a folding mechanism for folding the paper bundle ~~at said folding position,~~
wherein the second alignment mechanism is configured to align the paper bundle
conveyed by the first convey mechanism in a vicinity of a folding position to fold the paper
bundle,

wherein the second convey mechanism is configured to convey the paper bundle
aligned by the second alignment mechanism to the folding position, and

wherein the folding mechanism is configured to fold the aligned paper bundle at the
folding position.

Claim 27 (Original): A paper processing apparatus as claimed in Claim 26, wherein said first alignment mechanism is equipped with a first paper bundle controlling mechanism for aligning the paper bundle stacked by said stack mechanism in the paper feed direction by touching the downstream end of the paper bundle thereto and an alignment member for aligning the paper bundle in the direction perpendicular to the paper feed direction by touching the paper bundle in the direction perpendicular to the feed direction.

Claim 28 (Original): A paper processing apparatus as claimed in Claim 25, wherein said second alignment mechanism is equipped with a second bundle control mechanism for aligning the paper bundle conveyed by said first convey mechanism in the vicinity of the folding position by touching the downstream end of the paper bundle in the paper feed direction.

Claim 29 (Original): A paper processing apparatus as claimed in Claim 27, wherein it is equipped with a first control releasing mechanism for releasing the control by said first paper bundle control mechanism.

Claim 30 (Original): A paper processing apparatus as claimed in Claim 28, wherein it is equipped with a second control releasing mechanism for releasing the control by said second paper bundle control mechanism,

Claim 31 (Original): A paper processing apparatus as claimed in Claim 28, wherein said second paper bundle control mechanism and said second convey mechanism are disposed downstream in the paper bundle feed direction with respect to said folding position.

Claim 32 (Original): A paper processing apparatus as claimed in Claim 25, wherein the feed line includes a curved portion, which is disposed downstream in the paper bundle feed direction relative to said folding position.

Claim 33 (Original): A paper processing apparatus as claimed in Claim 25, further comprising: a first press contact force applying/releasing mechanism for applying a press contact force to a paper bundle regarding said first convey mechanism and for releasing the application of the press contact force; and a second press contact force applying/releasing mechanism for applying a press contact force to a paper bundle regarding said second convey mechanism and for releasing the application of the press contact force.

Claim 34 (Original): A paper processing apparatus as claimed in Claim 28, further comprising: a second control releasing mechanism for releasing the control by said second paper bundle control mechanism; a second press contact force applying/releasing mechanism for applying a press contact to the paper bundle regarding said second convey mechanism and for releasing the application of the press contact force; and a control mechanism for

controlling said first and second convey mechanism, said second control releasing mechanism and said second press contact force applying/releasing mechanism; wherein when the downstream end of the paper bundle in the paper feed direction is adjusted by said second paper bundle control mechanism, said control mechanism applies a press contact force to the paper bundle regarding said second convey mechanism by said second press contact applying/releasing mechanism, before releasing the control of said second paper bundle control mechanism by at least said second control releasing mechanism.

Claim 35 (Original): A paper processing apparatus as claimed in Claim 34, wherein said control mechanism maintains the press contact force provided by said second convey mechanism when the paper bundle is folded by said folding mechanism.

Claim 36 (Currently Amended): An image forming system comprising:
a paper processing apparatus including a process mechanism for applying a predetermined process to a paper sheet after image formation; and
an image forming apparatus mounted either as a unit or in a separated unit on said paper processing apparatus;
wherein said paper processing apparatus includes,
a stack mechanism for stacking the paper sheets;
a first alignment mechanism for aligning the a paper bundle stacked by said stack mechanism;
a first convey mechanism for conveying the paper bundle aligned by said first alignment mechanism;
a second alignment mechanism for aligning the paper bundle conveyed by the first convey mechanism in the vicinity of the folding position;

a second convey mechanism for conveying the paper bundle aligned by said second alignment mechanism ~~to said folding position~~ and

a folding mechanism for folding the paper bundle ~~at said folding position~~,

wherein the second alignment mechanism is configured to align the paper bundle conveyed by the first convey mechanism in a vicinity of a folding position to fold the paper bundle,

wherein the second convey mechanism is configured to convey the paper bundle aligned by the second alignment mechanism to the folding position, and

wherein the folding mechanism is configured to fold the aligned paper bundle at the folding position.

Claim 37 (Currently Amended): A paper processing method for applying a predetermined process to the paper sheet on which the image formation is carried out, comprising the following steps of:

forming a paper bundle by stacking the paper sheets;

aligning said paper bundle thus stacked;

aligning said paper bundle in ~~the~~ a vicinity of ~~the~~ a folding position to fold the paper bundle after conveying said paper bundle thus aligned;

conveying said paper bundle ~~thus~~ aligned in the vicinity of the folding position to said folding position; and

folding said paper bundle at said folding position.